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MIGRANT FILIPINA DOMESTIC WORKERS AND THE INTERNATIONAL DIVISION OF REPRODUCTIVE LABOR

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This article examines the politics of reproductive labor in globalization. Using the case of migrant Filipina domestic workers, the author presents the formation of a three-tier transfer of reproductive labor in globalization between the following groups of women: (1) middle-class women in receiving nations, (2) migrant domestic workers, and (3) Third World women who are too poor to migrate. The formation of this international division of labor suggests that reproduction activities, as they have been increasingly commodified, have to be situated in the context of the global market economy. This division of labor is a structural process that determines the migration of Filipina domestic workers. As such, this article also uses in-depth interviews to examine and enumerate the contradictions that migrant Filipina domestic workers experience in their family and work lives as a result of “being in the middle” of this division of labor.

Migrant Filipina women are employed as domestic workers in more than 130 countries (Tyner 1999). They comprise a substantial proportion of labor migrants in various nations in Europe and Asia as well as Canada (Bakan and Stasiulis 1997; Catholic Institute for International Relations [CIIR] 1987; Constable 1997). To a lesser extent, they are also employed as domestic workers in the United States (Hogeland and Rosen 1990). Even though Filipina migration is often assumed to be a middle-class professional stream (e.g., of nurses), two-thirds of female labor migrants from the Philippines are, in fact, domestic workers (Tolentino 1996). Only in the United States do Filipina migrant nurses outnumber domestic workers (Tyner 1999).¹

Looking at the migration and entrance of Filipina women into domestic work, this article documents the creation of a division of reproductive labor in the global economy. This particular division of labor occurs among working women and

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arises out of the demand for low-wage service workers in postindustrial nations. By reproductive labor, I refer to the labor needed to sustain the productive labor force. Such work includes household chores; the care of elderly, adults, and youth; the socialization of children; and the maintenance of social ties in the family (Brenner and Laslett 1991). Relegated to women more so than men, reproductive labor has long been a commodity purchased by class-privileged women. As Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1992) has observed, white class-privileged women in the United States have historically freed themselves of reproductive labor by purchasing the low-wage services of women of color. In doing so, they maintain a “racial division of reproductive labor,” which establishes a two-tier hierarchy among women (Nakano Glenn 1992).

Two analytical goals motivate my query into the structural relationship between the politics of reproductive labor and the flow of Filipina domestic worker migration. First, I return to the discussion of the commodification of reproductive labor initiated by Nakano Glenn (1992) to extend her discussion to an international terrain. In this way, my analysis of the division of reproductive labor considers issues of globalization and the feminization of wage labor (Sassen 1984, 1988). Second, I extend discussions of the international division of labor in globalization from a sole consideration of productive labor to include analyses of reproductive labor. By analyzing the structural relationship between reproductive labor and the feminization of the migrant labor force, I show another dimension by which gender shapes the economic divisions of labor in migration.

The globalization of the market economy has extended the politics of reproductive labor into an international level. As I show in this article, the migration and entrance into domestic work of Filipino women constitutes an international division of reproductive labor. This division of labor, which I name the *international transfer of caretaking*, refers to the three-tier transfer of reproductive labor among women in sending and receiving countries of migration. While class-privileged women purchase the low-wage services of migrant Filipina domestic workers, migrant Filipina domestic workers simultaneously purchase the even lower-wage services of poorer women left behind in the Philippines. In other words, migrant Filipina domestic workers hire poorer women in the Philippines to perform the reproductive labor that they are performing for wealthier women in receiving nations.

The international transfer of caretaking links two important but separate discourses on the status of women—Nakano Glenn’s (1992) discussion of the “racial division of reproductive labor” and Sassen’s discussion of the “international division of labor.” It demonstrates that these important formulations need to be expanded to take into account transnational issues of reproduction. To develop my argument, I begin by reviewing the two relevant bodies of literature—one on domestic work and reproductive labor and the second on female migration. Then, I describe my research methodology and the characteristics of my sample. To build my conceptual case, I first analyze the situation of Filipina domestic workers in the Philippines and the “receiving nations” of the United States and Italy. Then, I build

on this by adding the migration links that illustrate the international transfer of care-taking. This three-tier process is not merely a conceptual idea but has consequences for migrant Filipina domestic workers, which I give voice to in the final section. These consequences are particularly important to consider because they define the migratory experiences of the increasing number of migrant domestic workers from the Philippines.

REPRODUCTIVE LABOR AND PAID DOMESTIC WORK

My discussion of reproductive labor builds from research on domestic work and female migration. As I have noted, it is grounded in Nakano Glenn's (1992) important formulation of the "racial division of reproductive labor." Although reproductive labor has historically been relegated to women, Nakano Glenn argues that there is a hierarchical and interdependent relationship, one that interlocks the race and class status of women, in its distribution in the formal and informal labor market. According to Nakano Glenn (1992, 30), class-privileged women free themselves of the "mental, emotional, and manual labor" needed for "the creation and recreation of people as cultural and social, as well as physical beings" by hiring low-paid women of color. This form of low-wage labor encompasses a wide array of jobs including food-service production, hotel housekeeping, and nursing aide. In the commodification of reproductive labor, women are linked by gender and differentiated by race and class. Moreover, in its commodification, the worth of reproductive labor declines in society. As Katz Rothman (1989, 43) poignantly states, "When performed by mothers, we call this mothering . . . when performed by hired hands, we call it unskilled."

Various case studies on domestic work establish that women often use their class privilege to buy themselves out of their gender subordination (Palmer 1989; Romero 1992; Thornton Dill 1994). As Mary Romero (1992, 129-30) puts it: "The never-ending job described by housewives is transferred to workers employed by women who treat domestic service as an opportunity to 'hire a wife.'" From discussions of the spatial segregation of paid domestic workers to the documentation of the script of "deference and maternalism" (Rollins 1985) in the workplace, numerous studies have also shown that the race and class inequalities that structure this division of labor are aggravated in the daily practices of paid household work (Romero 1992; Thornton Dill 1994). Documenting the hierarchy of womanhood in the United States during the pre-World War II period, Phyllis Palmer (1989), for example, describes the reflection of race and class hierarchies in the division of labor between "clean mistresses" and "dirty servants." According to Palmer, the more physically strenuous labor of the servant enabled the mistress to attain the markers of ideal femininity—fragility and cleanliness. This hierarchy continues today as the most demanding physical labor in the household is still relegated to the paid domestic worker.

While scholarship on domestic work establishes the unequal relations between domestics and their employers, it has yet to interrogate substantially the consequences of paid domestic work on the families of domestic workers themselves. An exception to this is Romero's (1997) research on the children of domestic workers. One of the questions that needs to be addressed further is, "Who cares for the domestics' family?" Elaine Bell Kaplan (1987) notes that the oldest daughters of domestics usually take over their familial duties. David Katzman (1978) similarly observed that African American domestics in the South turned to their families, specifically grandparents, for the care of children. In their article on transnational mothering, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ernestine Avila (1997) ask a similar question: "Who is taking care of the nanny's children?" They found that transnational Latina mothers, many of whom are domestic workers, frequently rely on other female relatives as well as paid domestic workers for the care of their children left in the sending country. The observation of Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila raises questions about the new forms of structural inequalities and social consequences that are engendered by the extension of commodified reproductive labor to an international terrain. To address international relations of inequality in reproductive labor, I now situate my discussion of the politics of reproductive labor in literature of female migration and the globalization of the market economy.

WOMEN AND MIGRATION

Contemporary labor migration is situated in the globalization of the market economy. As Saskia Sassen has further indicated, globalization has sparked the feminization of migrant labor. Contributing an insightful theoretical framework on the position of women in the global economy, Sassen (1984, 1988) establishes that globalization simultaneously demands the low-wage labor of Third World women in export processing zones of developing countries and in secondary tiers of manufacturing and service sectors in advanced, capitalist countries. The case of women in the Philippines provides an exemplary illustration. While Filipina women comprised 74 percent of the labor force in export processing zones by the early 1980s (Rosca 1995), they constituted more than half of international migrants (55 percent) by the early 1990s (Asis 1992).

In globalization, the penetration of manufacturing production in developing countries creates a demand for women to migrate to advanced, capitalist countries. First of all, the manufacturing production (e.g., garment, electronics, and furniture) that remains in the latter set of countries must compete with low production costs in developing countries. This results in the decentralization and deregulation of manufacturing production (i.e., subcontracting or homework). Second, multinational corporations with production facilities across the globe, by and large, maintain central operations in new economic centers, or what Sassen (1994) refers to as "global cities," where specialized professional services (e.g., legal, financial, accounting, and consulting tasks) are concentrated. For the most part, global cities

require low-wage service labor such as domestic work to maintain the lifestyles of their professional inhabitants. Notably, many of the low-paying jobs created in advanced, capitalist countries are considered traditional "women's work." As a result, many of the immigrants who respond to the increasing demand for low-wage workers in advanced, capitalist countries are women.

The movement of manufacturing production to newly industrialized countries of Asia also generates a demand for female migrant workers. The increase in production activities in these economies has subsumed the traditional proletariat female workforce who would otherwise perform low-paying service jobs such as domestic work. This shift in labor market concentration has consequently generated a need for the lower-wage labor of women from neighboring countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines to fill the void created in the Asian service sector (Chin 1998).

Independent female migration has correspondingly increased with the feminization of wage labor in the global economy. For example, in a study of Central American refugees in Washington, D.C., Repak (1995) establishes that gender is a structural determinant of migration by showing that the greater demand for low-wage female workers in this particular receiving community initiated the primary migration of women. In the case of the Philippines, the independent nature of female migration is shown by the different destinations of male and female labor migrants in the diaspora. As male and female migrants fill different niches in the global economy, migration from the Philippines results in two gendered flows with women initiating migration to countries with a greater demand for female workers and men migrating to countries with a greater demand for male workers (Tyner 1994). In fact, the gender composition of many Filipino migrant communities is skewed. Women compose more than 70 percent of migrant Filipinos in Asian and European cities (Constable 1997; Salazar Parreñas 1998), where labor markets have a greater demand for low-wage service workers. In contrast, men compose the majority of Filipino labor migrants in the Middle East (Tyner 1994), where there are more jobs available in construction and oil industries.

On one hand, the case of Filipina domestic workers fits Sassen's theoretical formulation. As low-wage service workers, they meet the rising demand for cheap labor in the global cities of Asia and Europe and, to a lesser extent, the United States. On the other hand, this theoretical formulation only concentrates on relations of production in globalization. The structural relationship between work and family is not examined in macro-level accounts of the demand for migrant laborers. In contrast, literature on female migration has turned to the institutional-level perspective to pay closer attention to the analytical principle of gender in the family. By analyzing social relations of men and women in the family, feminist scholars of migration have shown that gender organizes, shapes, and distinguishes the immigration patterns and experiences of men and women (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). In my study of the politics of reproductive labor under globalization, I take note of this rich discussion in feminist migration studies.

Situating migrant Filipina domestic workers in the transnational politics of reproductive labor extends Sassen's formulation by stressing the fact that participants in the new international division of labor, from the low-wage migrant worker to the professionals whom they serve, have families. Accounting for these families allows us to give greater consideration to gender in discussions of divisions of labor in globalization and enables us to more fully describe the labor processes of migration.

METHOD

This article is based primarily on open-ended interviews that I collected with 46 female domestic workers in Rome and 26 in Los Angeles. I tape-recorded and fully transcribed each of my interviews, which were mostly conducted in Tagalog and then translated into English.

I chose the field research sites of Rome and Los Angeles because the United States and Italy have the largest populations of Filipino migrants to Western countries (Karp 1995). Both destinations also have particular colonial ties to the Philippines. While the United States maintains economic dominance in relation to the Philippines, Italy enjoys cultural dominance indirectly through the institution of the Roman Catholic Church. As a consequence of these macro-historical links, Filipinos have come to represent one of the largest migrant groups in both the United States and Italy (Caritas di Roma 1995; Portes and Rumbaut 1996). By 1990, the flow of legal migration from the Philippines was, next to Mexico, the second largest in the United States and the third largest, next to Morocco and Tunisia, in Italy (Campani 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 1996).

The interviews in Italy ranged from one and one-half to three hours in length. I also conducted tape-recorded interviews with various community leaders (e.g., elected officers of community associations). I collected an unsystematic sample of research participants by using chain and snowball referrals and began soliciting research participants by visiting numerous community sites such as churches, parks, and plazas.

In Los Angeles, I collected a smaller sample of in-depth interviews with Filipina domestic workers, also ranging from one and one-half to three hours in length. My U.S. sample is smaller because, unlike their counterparts in Rome, Filipina migrants in Los Angeles, or in the United States in general, are not concentrated in the informal service sector. Instead, they occupy a wider range of occupational sectors. Another factor contributing to the smaller sample in Los Angeles is the small representation of Filipinas among domestic workers. Filipinas are but a minority among the larger group of Latina domestics. Yet, according to the community-based organization Pilipino Worker's Center, Filipinas dominate elderly care services in Los Angeles.

In the field research site of Los Angeles, tapping into the community began with the network of my mother's friends and relatives. To diversify my sample, I posted

flyers in various ethnic enclave businesses. Two women responded to the flyers. Using networks of domestic workers, the samples of interviewees were collected unsystematically through a snowball method, as I did in Italy. Participant observation provided a gateway to the community as I attended meetings of Filipino labor groups, the occasional Filipino town fiestas, and the more frequent Filipino family parties, and I spent time with domestic workers at their own and their employers' homes.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

My sample of domestic workers in Rome and Los Angeles reveals women who are mostly mothers with a fairly high level of educational attainment. Contrary to the popular belief that Filipina domestic workers are usually young and single (CIIR 1987), my study shows a larger number of married women. In Los Angeles, only 5 of 26 interviewees are never-married single women, while in Rome, less than half of the women I interviewed (19) are never married. Women with children living in the Philippines constitute the majority of my sample in both Rome and Los Angeles: 25 of 46 in Rome and 14 of 26 in Los Angeles.

Because they perform jobs that are considered unskilled, domestic workers are often assumed to lack the training needed for higher status jobs in the labor market. In the case of Filipina domestics in Italy and the United States, the prestige level of their current work does not in any way reveal their level of educational training. Most of my interviewees had acquired some years of postsecondary training in the Philippines. In Rome, my interviewees include 23 women with college degrees, 12 with some years of college or postsecondary vocational training, and 7 who completed high school. In Los Angeles, my interviewees include 11 women with college diplomas, 8 with some years of college or postsecondary vocational training, and 5 with high school degrees.

Even with a high level of educational attainment, Filipina women migrate and enter domestic work because they still earn higher wages as domestic workers in postindustrial nations than as professional workers in the Philippines. In Rome, part-time workers—as day workers are called in the Filipino migrant community—receive an average monthly wage of 1,844,000 lira (U.S.\$1,229), live-in workers 1,083,000 lira (U.S.\$722), and elderly caregivers 1,167,000 lira (U.S.\$778).² After taking into account the additional cost of living for part-time workers, there is just a slight difference in salary between the three types of domestic workers. In Los Angeles, Filipina domestic workers are not concentrated in day work as are other immigrant women. Instead, they are mostly live-in workers. In contrast to women in Rome, they receive a weekly instead of a monthly salary, which is an arrangement that they prefer as it results in higher earnings. Elderly caregivers receive on average a salary of U.S.\$425 per week and live-in housekeepers and child caregivers receive on average U.S.\$350 per week. Wages of domestic workers in Rome and Los Angeles are significantly higher than those that they had received in the

Philippines. Among my interviewees, the average monthly salary of women who had worked in the Philippines during the 1990s was only U.S.\$179.

REPRODUCTIVE LABOR IN SENDING AND RECEIVING NATIONS

Migrant Filipina domestic workers depart from a system of gender stratification in the Philippines only to enter another one in the advanced capitalist and industrialized countries of the United States and Italy. In both sending and receiving nations, they confront societies with similar gender ideologies concerning the division of labor in the family; that is, reproductive labor is relegated to women. Yet, in the receiving nation of either Italy or the United States, racial, class, and citizenship inequalities aggravate the position of migrant Filipinas as women (Andall 1992; Nakano Glenn 1992). In this section, I discuss the politics of reproductive labor at both ends of the migration spectrum. My discussion gives greater consideration to those in the receiving nations, because of their greater relevance for our understanding of the labor market incorporation of migrant Filipina domestic workers in globalization.

In the Philippines, men are expected to sustain the family and women to reproduce family life. In fact, ideological constructs of feminine identity are molded from "mothering and caring roles in the domestic arena" (Israel-Sobritchea 1990). The ideology of women as caretakers constrains the productive labor activities of women in many ways, including sex segregating them into jobs resembling "wife-and-mother roles" (Chant and McIlwaine 1995; Uy Eviota 1992), such as household work on plantations and professional work in nursing and teaching. Because women are expected only to subsidize the primary income of men, women's jobs are often less valued and far less lucrative than comparable men's work (e.g., fieldwork as opposed to household work in plantations) (Uy Eviota 1992). Despite these constraints, women do participate in the productive labor force (Aguilar 1988) and in 1992, the female share of total employment in the Philippines reached 37.7 percent (Chant 1997). Considering that only 2 percent of all households in the Philippines can afford to hire domestic help, these working women are plagued by the double day (Aguilar 1988).

For the remainder of this section, I situate the migration of Filipina domestic workers in the politics of reproductive labor in the receiving countries of the United States and Italy. I do so to place their labor market incorporation in the context of the racial division of reproductive labor. In the United States, women represented 46.5 percent of gainfully employed workers in 1992, a considerable increase over 32.1 percent in 1960 (Reskin and Padavic 1994, 24-25). In Italy, the downward trend in the labor force participation of women from 1959 to 1972 has since reversed (Meyer 1987). In fact, Italy has witnessed an increasing number of married women in the labor force, but a surprising decline among younger single women (Goddard

1996). It has been argued that Italian women are turning away from reproducing families and concentrating on their advancement in the labor market (Specter 1998). Italy, although known to be "the traditional 'bambini' country," has the lowest birthrate in the world at only 9.6 per 1,000 inhabitants (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995, 102).

According to Arlie Hochschild (1989), at least in the United States, the majority of men do less housework than do their gainfully employed partners, and men who earned less than their wives were even less likely to share housework. And so today, a significantly larger number of women have to cope with the double day. Similarly in Italy, *doppio lavoro* (literally meaning double work) has been a recurring theme in the Italian feminist movement since the early 1970s (Chiavola Birnbaum 1986). Notably, the amount of household work expected of women has increased with advances in technology (Glazer 1993).

While a higher income does not guarantee a more gender egalitarian distribution of housework, it does give families the flexibility to afford the services of other women. To ease the double day, many overwhelmed women in the United States have turned to day care centers and family day care providers, nursing homes, after-school baby-sitters, and also privately hired domestic workers (Glazer 1993; Katz Rothman 1989; Nakano Glenn 1992; Nelson 1990; Reskin and Padavic 1994). In Italy, this same trend is reflected in the concentration of women from the Philippines, Cape Verde, and Peru in domestic services as well as the estimated 36.4 percent of illegal workers who are doing domestic work (Calavita 1994). Notably, Italian women have turned to new tactics to minimize their reproductive labor. While Italian feminists demanded "wages for housework" in the 1970s (Chiavola Birnbaum 1986, 135), it can be said that Italian women have since taken to refusing to reproduce the family altogether. Without doubt, this is a unique means by which many Italian women minimize their reproductive labor directly.

The labor market incorporation of migrant Filipina domestic workers into the United States and Italy fits into Nakano Glenn's schema. In both countries, they join the ranks of other groups of subordinated women who have historically performed the reproductive labor of more privileged women. In making this assertion, I do not claim that Filipinas in the United States are defined racially as domestic workers like Latina migrants. They are more so categorized and identified as nurses, because of their concentration in health care services. Yet, in the Filipino migrant community, it is known that recent migrants frequently turn to domestic work.³

Reflecting the observations of Nakano Glenn, Andall (1992, 43) associates the entrance of migrant women into Italy—as they are concentrated in domestic work—with the entrance of Italian women into the labor force:

The migration of women into Italy began at the same time as a number of changes were taking place in the role and position of Italian women within society . . . in the 1970s, an increased number of Italian women began to assert themselves outside the domestic sphere. . . . This change in Italian women's activity became a pull factor in the migration of women from developing countries.

Nakano Glenn's (1992) formulation of the racial division of reproductive labor suggests that the demand for low-wage service workers, particularly domestic workers, arises not solely from the concentration of highly specialized professional services in global cities, as Sassen has argued correctly, but also from persisting gender inequalities in the families of these professionals. To fully consider the politics of reproductive labor in the migration of Filipina domestic workers, I now expand and reformulate the concept of the racial division of reproductive labor by placing it in a transnational setting. In doing so, I situate the increasing demand for paid reproductive labor in receiving nations in the context of the globalization of the market economy.

THE INTERNATIONAL DIVISION OF REPRODUCTIVE LABOR

Globalization has triggered the formation of a singular market economy. As such, production activities in one area can no longer be understood solely from a local perspective. Likewise, I argue that reproduction activities, especially as they have been increasingly commodified, have to be situated in the context of this singular market economy. In this sense, I insist that reproduction activities in one area have concrete ties to reproduction activities in another area. With the feminization of wage labor, global capitalism is forging the creation of links among distinct systems of gender inequality. Moreover, the migration of women connects systems of gender inequality in both sending and receiving nations to global capitalism. All of these processes occur in the formation of the international division of reproductive labor.

This division of labor places Nakano Glenn's (1992) "racial division of reproductive labor" in an international context under the auspices of Saskia Sassen's discussion of the incorporation of women from developing countries into the global economy. It is a transnational division of labor that is shaped simultaneously by global capitalism, gender inequality in the sending country, and gender inequality in the receiving country. This division of labor determines the migration and entrance into domestic service of women from the Philippines.

The international transfer of caretaking is a distinct form of the international division of labor in which Filipina domestic workers perform the reproductive labor or the "private sphere" responsibilities of class-privileged women in industrialized countries as they leave other women in the Philippines to perform their own. This international division of labor refers to a three-tier transfer of reproductive labor among women in two nation-states. These groups of women are (1) middle-class women in receiving countries, (2) migrant Filipina domestic workers, and (3) Filipina domestic workers in the Philippines who are too poor to migrate.

Under the international transfer of caretaking, women's migration from the Philippines is embedded in the process of global capitalism. At the same time, gender is

also a central factor of their migration. The process of migration for women involves escaping their gender roles in the Philippines, easing the gender constraints of the women who employ them in industrialized countries, and finally relegating their gender roles to women left in the Philippines.⁴

The international transfer of caretaking refers to a social, political, and economic relationship between women in the global labor market. This division of labor is a structural relationship based on the class, race, gender, and (nation-based) citizenship of women. In the international transfer of caretaking, Filipina domestic workers do not just ease the entrance of other women into the paid labor force but also assist in the economic growth of receiving countries. Patricia Licuanan (1994, 109), in reference to households in Hong Kong and Singapore, explains,

Households are said to have benefited greatly by the import of domestic workers. Family income has increased because the wife and other women members of working age are freed from domestic chores and are able to join the labour force. This higher income would normally result in the enlargement of the consumer market and greater demand on production and consequently a growth in the economy.

In the article "Economy Menders," Linda Layosa (1995, 7), the editor of the transnational monthly magazine *Tinig Filipino*, describes the international transfer of caretaking:

Indeed, our women have partially been liberated from the anguish of their day-to-day existence with their families and from economic problems, only to be enslaved again in the confines of another home, most of the time trampling their rights as human beings . . . we have to face the reality that many of our women will be compelled to leave the confines of their own tidy bedrooms and their spotless kitchens only to clean another household, to mend other's torn clothes at the same time mend our tattered economy.

In her description, she falls short of mentioning who takes up the household work that migrant Filipina domestic workers abandon upon migration. Most likely, they are other female relatives, but also less privileged Filipina women, women unable to afford the high costs of seeking employment outside of the Philippines. Thus, migrant Filipina domestic workers are in the middle of the three-tier hierarchy of the international transfer of caretaking.

The case of Carmen Ronquillo provides a good illustration of the international transfer of caretaking.⁵ Carmen is simultaneously a domestic worker of a professional woman in Rome and an employer of a domestic worker in the Philippines. Carmen describes her relationship to each of these two women:

When coming here, I mentally surrendered myself and forced my pride away from me to prepare myself. But I lost a lot of weight. I was not used to the work. You see, I had maids in the Philippines. I have a maid in the Philippines that has worked for me since my daughter was born twenty-four years ago. She is still with me. I paid her three hundred pesos before and now I pay her one thousand pesos.⁶

I am a little bit luckier than others because I run the entire household. My employer is a divorced woman who is an architect. She does not have time to run her household so I do all the shopping. I am the one budgeting. I am the one cooking. [Laughs.] And I am the one cleaning too. She has a 24 and 26 year old. The older one graduated already and is an electrical engineer. The other one is taking up philosophy. They still live with her. . . . She has been my only employer. I stayed with her because I feel at home with her. She never commands. She never orders me to do this and to do that.

The hierarchical and interdependent relationship between Carmen, her employer in Italy, and her domestic worker in the Philippines forms from the unequal development of industrialized and developing countries in transnational capitalism, class differences in the Philippines, and the relegation of reproductive labor to women. The case of Carmen Ronquillo clearly exemplifies how three distinct groups of women participate in the international transfer of caretaking. While Carmen frees her employer (the architect) of domestic responsibilities, a lower paid domestic worker does the household work for Carmen and her family.

Wage differences of domestic workers illuminate the economic disparity among nations in transnational capitalism. A domestic worker in Italy such as Carmen could receive U.S.\$1,000 per month for her labor:

I earn 1,500,000 lira (U.S.\$1,000) and she pays for my benefits (e.g., medical coverage). On Sundays, I have a part-time (job), I clean her office in the morning and she pays me 300,000 lira (U.S.\$200). I am very fortunate because she always gives me my holiday pay (August) and my thirteenth month pay in December. Plus, she gives me my liquidation pay at the end of the year. Employers here are required to give you a liquidation pay—equivalent to your monthly salary for every year you worked for them, but they usually give it to you when you leave but she insists on paying me at the end of the year. So, on December, I always receive 5,400,000 lira (U.S.\$3,600).

The wages of Carmen easily afford her a domestic worker in the Philippines, who, on average, only earns the below-poverty wage of U.S.\$40 per month. Moreover, the domestic worker in the Philippines, in exchange for her labor, does not receive the additional work benefits Carmen receives for the same labor, for example, medical coverage. Not surprisingly, migrant Filipina domestic workers, as shown by their high level of educational attainment, tend to have more resources and belong in a more comfortable class strata than do domestic workers in the Philippines. Such resources often enable Carmen and other migrant Filipina women to afford the option of working outside of the country.

THE OVERLOOKED PARTICIPANTS: CHILDREN AND WOMEN IN THE PHILIPPINES

The private world remains devalued, as poor people become the wives and mothers of the world, cleaning the toilets and raising the children. The devaluing of certain work,

of nurturance, of private "domestic" work, remains: rearing children is roughly on a par—certainly in terms of salary—with cleaning the toilet. (Katz Rothman 1989, 252)

While the devaluation of "rearing children" could be lamented as a tragedy for children, the experiences of the different groups of children (and elderly) in the international transfer of caretaking should be distinguished between those who remain cared for and those who are not and those who regularly see their parents/children and those who cannot. The fact that "rearing children is roughly on a par . . . with cleaning the toilet" means that migrant Filipina domestic workers usually cannot afford the higher costs of maintaining a family in industrialized countries due to their meager wages. In the United States, where people of color have traditionally been caregivers and domestic workers for white families, mothering is diverted away from people of color families. Sau-ling Wong (1994, 69) defines *diverted mothering* to be the process in which the "time and energy available for mothering are diverted from those who, by kinship or communal ties, are their more rightful recipients." Historically, a married Black domestic worker in the United States "typically saw her children once every two weeks, leaving them in the care of the husband or older siblings, while remaining on call around the clock for the employer's children" (Wong 1994, 71). Now, in an international context, the same pattern of diverted mothering could be described for Filipina, Latina, and Caribbean domestic workers as many are forced to leave their children behind in the country of origin (Colen 1995; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997).⁷ The question then is, Who cares for these "other" children?

In the Philippines, it is unusual for fathers to nurture and care for their children, but, considering that not all migrant Filipina domestic workers hire domestic workers, some are forced to give in to the renegotiations of household division of labor led by the migration of their wives. Other female relatives often take over the household work of migrant Filipinas. In these cases, nonegalitarian relations among family members should be acknowledged considering that for female family members left in the Philippines, "the mobility they might achieve through migration is severely curtailed" (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994, 241). However, hired domestic workers—a live-in housekeeper or *labandera* (laundry woman who hand washes clothes)—also free migrant Filipina domestics of their household labor. Almost all of my interviewees in both Rome and Los Angeles hire domestic workers in the Philippines. This should not be surprising considering that the average wage of domestics in the Philippines is considerably less than the average wage of migrant domestics.

In discussions of the international division of (productive) labor, women who cannot afford to work as domestic workers in other countries are equated with those who do so. For example, migrant Filipina domestic workers and female low-wage workers in the Philippines are considered to be equally displaced in global capitalism. Maya Areza, who dreams of retiring in the Philippines after a few more years

in the United States, reminds us of the structural inequalities characterizing relations among women in developing countries when she states,

When I retire I plan to go home for good. I plan to stay at my parents' house . . . I would just lounge and smoke. I will get a domestic helper who I can ask to get my cigarettes for me. . . . My children and my cousins all have domestic workers. You can hire one if you have money. It's cheap, only one thousand pesos (\$40). Here, you earn \$1,000 doing the same kind of work you would do for one thousand pesos there! I won't have a problem with hiring one.

Because migrant Filipina domestic workers are usually in the middle of the hierarchical chain of caretaking, they maintain unequal relations with less privileged women in the Philippines. Under the international transfer of caretaking, the unequal economic standing of nation-states and discrepancies in monetary currencies are prominent factors that distinguish the position of female low-wage workers in advanced, capitalist, and developing countries. They differentiate, for example, the position of domestic workers in the United States and Italy from domestic workers in the Philippines. Migrant Filipina domestic workers surely take advantage of these differences in wages and maintain a direct hierarchical relationship with the domestic workers whom they hire in the Philippines. In the international transfer of caretaking, domestic workers (e.g., housekeepers and laundry women) hired by families of domestic workers abroad are the truly subaltern women.

THE SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF "BEING IN THE MIDDLE"

So far, I have established the formation of the international division of reproductive labor. As a structural process that determines the migration of Filipina domestic workers, this division of labor also results in particular social consequences that are embodied in the lived experience of its participants. In this section, I illuminate the social consequences of "being in the middle" of this division of labor. The process in which reproductive labor is transferred to migrant Filipinas is not as smooth as it sounds. For many, the process involves multiple contradictions in their positions in the family and the labor market.

To illuminate the consequences of "being in the middle," I return to the story of Carmen Ronquillo. Before migrating to Rome, Carmen, who is in her mid-40s, had worked for 15 years as a project manager of the military food services at Clark Air Force Base. With the closure of this U.S. military base in 1992, Carmen thought that she could not find a job that offered a comparably lucrative income in the Philippines. Therefore, Carmen decided to follow her sister to Rome, where she could earn much more as a domestic worker than as a professional in the Philippines. Seeking employment in Italy was a huge investment for her family. Carmen paid an agency U.S.\$5,000 to enter Italy without a visa. The high costs of migration from the Philippines suggest that this option is usually limited to those with financial

means. Consequently, labor migration for Carmen and the many other middle-class women who can afford to leave the Philippines usually entails the emotional strains brought by their downward mobility to the lower status job of domestic work. As Carmen describes,

My life is difficult here. Would you believe that here I am a “physical laborer”? When I was working in the Philippines, I was the one supervising the supervisors. [Laughs.] So, when I came here, especially when I cleaned the bathrooms, I would talk to myself. [Laughs hysterically.] I would commend and praise myself, telling myself, “Oh, you clean the corners very well.” [Laughs.] You see, in my old job, I would always check the corners first, that was how I checked if my workers had cleaned the place well. So, sometimes I would just cry. I felt like I was slapped in the face. I resent the fact that we cannot use our skills especially because most of us Filipinos here are professionals. We should be able to do other kinds of work because if you only do housework, your brain deteriorates. Your knowledge deteriorates. Your whole being is that of a maid.

As reflected in the bitter attitude of Carmen toward domestic work, a central contradiction of being in the middle of the international transfer of caretaking is the experience of *conflicting class mobility*. For migrant Filipinas, domestic work simultaneously involves an increase and decrease in class status. They earn more than they ever would have if they had stayed as professional women in the Philippines. Yet, at the same time, they experience a sharp decline in occupational status and face a discrepancy between their current occupation and actual training. For the women “in the middle,” this discrepancy highlights the low status of domestic work.

Vanessa Dulang, an office worker in the Philippines and domestic worker in Rome since 1990, describes the gains and losses that migrant women such as herself incur from the limited labor market option of either staying in the Philippines or working as a domestic outside of the country:

Life is hard in the Philippines. You don't earn enough. Nothing will happen to you if you stay there. Even though you are a maid here, at least you are earning money. What I couldn't buy in the Philippines, I could buy here. . . . But work is difficult. You bend your back scrubbing. You experience what you would never experience in the Philippines. In the Philippines, your work is light but you don't have any money. Here you make money, but your body is exhausted.

In the spatial politics of globalization—unequal development of regions—the achievement of material security in the Philippines entails the experience of downward mobility in other countries. According to Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc (1994, 234), this decline in social status in migration generally pushes migrants to build “deterritorialized national identities.” They cope with their marginal status in the receiving country by basing their identities on the increase in their class status in the country of origin. In the same vein, migrant Filipina domestic workers resolve their conflicting class mobility by stressing their higher social and class status in the Philippines.

They do just that by hiring their very own domestic workers or perceiving themselves as rightful beneficiaries of servitude. In this way, they are able to mitigate their loss of status in migration. As Joy Manlapit of Los Angeles tells me,

When I go back, I want to experience being able to be my own boss in the house. I want to be able to order someone to make me coffee, to serve me food. That is good. That is how you can take back all the hardships you experienced before. That is something you struggled for.

Gloria Yogore, her counterpart in Rome, finds similar comfort in the knowledge of the higher social status she occupies and will occupy once she returns to the Philippines:

In the Philippines, I have maids. When I came here, I kept on thinking that in the Philippines, I have maids and here I am one. I thought to myself that once I go back to the Philippines, I will not lift my finger and I will be the *signora*. [Laughs.] My hands will be rested and manicured and I will wake up at 12 o'clock noon.

Ironically, migrant Filipina domestic workers find comfort from the contradiction of the simultaneous decline and increase in their class background by stressing the greater privilege that they have and will have in relation to poorer women in the Philippines.

Another consequence of being in the middle is the experience of the *pain of family separation*. Being in the middle is contingent on being part of a transnational household, meaning a household whose members are located in two or more nation-states. Among my interviewees, 41 of 46 women in Rome and 20 of 26 women in Los Angeles maintain such households. I placed my interviewees categorically under this type of household structure on the basis that their remittances sustain the day-to-day living expenses of their immediate and extended families in the Philippines. Almost all of the never-married single women without children in my sample (14 in Rome and 6 in Los Angeles) are, in fact, part of transnational households. Notably, only 1 single woman does not send remittances to the Philippines regularly.

Emotional strains of transnational family life include feelings of loss, guilt, and loneliness for the mothers and daughters working as domestics in other countries. Plagued by the *pain of family separation*, women like Carmen struggle with the emotional strains of family separation in their daily lives:

My son, whenever he writes me, he always draws the head of Fido the dog with tears on the eyes. Whenever he goes to mass on Sundays, he tells me that he misses me more because he sees his friends with their mothers. Then, he comes home and cries. He says that he does not want his father to see him crying so he locks himself in his room. When I think of them [her children] is when I feel worst about being here. I was very very close to my two children. . . . Whenever I think of my children, I am struck with this terrible loneliness.

Being in the middle of the international division of reproductive labor entails geographical distance in families and consequently emotional strains for “lonely” mothers and “miserable” children in the Philippines.

Another contradiction of being in the middle of the international division of reproductive labor or the international transfer of caretaking is the fact that women in the middle must care for someone else’s grandchildren, children, or parents while unable to care for their own. In contrast to the two other social consequences that I have previously described, this is not unique to the transnational situation of migrant domestic workers. It has been observed in the United States with nonmigrant domestics (Katzman 1978). However, it does reflect one of the structural constraints faced by Filipina domestic workers in the process of globalization: The choice of maximizing their earnings as transnational low-wage workers denies them the intimacy of the family. Thus, caregiving is made a more painful experience. As Christina Manansala, a domestic worker in Rome since 1990, states, “Of course it is hard to take care of other children. Why should I be taking care of other children when I cannot take care of my own child myself?” Another domestic worker in Rome adds,

Sometimes when I look at the children that I care for, I feel like crying. I always think about how if we did not need the money, we would all be together and I would be raising my children myself. (Analin Mahusay, children are three and five years old)

The pain of caregiving leads to another contradiction and that is the experience of *displaced mothering* or more generally, *displaced caretaking*, which is also a social consequence that is not unique to the international division of reproductive labor.

Unable to take care of their own families, migrant Filipina domestic workers, like the nonmigrant domestics forced into “diverted mothering” in the United States, find themselves needing to “pour [their] love” to their wards. As Vicky Diaz, a mother in Los Angeles who left five children between the ages of 2 and 10 years old in the Philippines 10 years ago, describes her relationship to her ward, “The only thing you can do is give all your love to the child. In my absence from my children, the most I could do with my situation is give all my love to that child.” Trinidad Borrromeo of Rome finds similar comfort from “pouring her love” to her elderly ward, “When I take care of an elderly, I treat her like she is my own mother.” Notably, some women develop an aversion to caregiving, like Ruby Mercado of Rome, who states, “I do not like taking care of children when I could not take care of my own children. It hurt too much.” However, most of my interviewees do indeed feel less guilt for leaving behind their families in the Philippines when caring for and “pouring [their] love” to another family. Ironically, as mothering is transferred to domestic workers, those without children, such as Jerrisa Lim of Los Angeles, begin to feel that they know what it is like to mother: “After doing child care, I feel like I experienced what it is like to be a mother. It is hard to have children. There are pleasures that go with it. That is true. But it is hard.” The idea that domestic work

involves the act of “pouring love” suggests that a certain degree of emotional bonds to dependents in the family, including children and elderly persons, are passed down in the transfer of caretaking. By operating in the realm of emotion, the commodification of caretaking is further heightened in globalization.

CONCLUSION

The hierarchy of womanhood—based on race, class, and nation—establishes a work transfer system of reproductive labor among women—the international transfer of caretaking. It is a distinct form of transnational division of labor that links women in an interdependent relationship. Filipina domestic workers perform the reproductive labor of more privileged women in industrialized countries as they relegate their reproductive labor to poorer women left in the Philippines. The international division of reproductive labor shows us that production is not the sole means by which international divisions of labor operate in the global economy. Local economies are not solely linked by the manufacturing production of goods. In globalization, the transfer of reproductive labor moves beyond territorial borders to connect separate nation-states. The extension of reproductive labor to a transnational terrain is embedded in the operation of transnational families and the constant flow of resources from migrant domestic workers to the families that they continue to support in the Philippines. While acting as the primary income earners of their families, migrant Filipina domestic workers hire poorer domestic workers to perform the household duties that are traditionally relegated to them as women. In this way, they continue to remain responsible for the reproductive labor in their families but at the same time, as migrant workers, take on the responsibility of productive labor.

The formulation of the international division of reproductive labor treats gender as a central analytical lens for understanding the migration of Filipina domestic workers. It shows that the movement of Filipina domestic workers is embedded in a gendered system of transnational capitalism. While forces of global capitalism spur the labor migration of Filipina domestic workers, the demand for their labor also results from gender inequities in receiving nations, specifically the relegation of reproductive labor to women. This transfer of labor strongly suggests that despite their increasing rate of labor market participation, women continue to remain responsible for reproductive labor in both sending and receiving countries. At both ends of the migratory stream, they have not been able to negotiate directly with male counterparts for a fairer division of household work but instead have had to rely on their race and/or class privilege by participating in the transnational transfer of gender constraints to less-privileged women.

Ironically, women in industrialized (Western) countries are often assumed to be more liberated than women are in developing countries. Yet, many women are able to pursue careers as their male counterparts do because disadvantaged migrant

women and other women of color are stepping into their old shoes and doing their household work for them. As women transfer their reproductive labor to less and less privileged women, we can see that the traditional division of labor in the patriarchal nuclear household has not been significantly renegotiated in various countries in the world. This is one of the central reasons why there is a need for Filipina domestic workers in more than 100 countries today.

NOTES

1. Responding to the shortage of medical personnel in the U.S. labor market, Filipina nurses entered the United States through the third preference category of the 1965 *Immigration and Nationality Act* with the assistance of recruitment agencies in both the Philippines and the United States. See Ong and Azores (1994) for an extensive discussion of the migration of Filipina nurses.

2. One thousand five hundred lira is approximately one U.S. dollar.

3. This is caused by a combination of their undocumented status, inability to use their training and work experience from the Philippines, and/or the ethnic niche in caregiving that has developed in the Filipino migrant community. In a study of undocumented women in the United States, Hogeland and Rosen (1990, 43) found that 64 percent of 57 survey participants from the Philippines are employed as domestic workers.

4. Notably, in the Philippines, older (female) children, not fathers, are more likely to look after younger siblings while their mothers work (Chant and McLlwaine 1995). In addition, daughters are traditionally expected to care for aging parents.

5. I use pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of my informants.

6. One thousand pesos amount to approximately U.S.\$40.

7. In most other receiving nations, migrant Filipinos are deterred from family migration by their relegation to the status of temporary migrants or their ineligibility for family reunification (Constable 1997).

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